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SUBJECT: MFA MEETS WITH AMBASSADOR-DRUMS UP GOB OUTCRY OVER
U.S VISA BAN AND FINANCIAL SANCTIONS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: On June 23, Head of the MFA's U.S. and Canada Desk Sergey Sergeyev formally relayed GOB irritation with the U.S. imposition of visa bans and financial sanctions against GOB officials. Ambassador reiterated the USG had long warned the GOB the U.S. would take such actions against GOB officials who repress the rights of Belarusian citizens. Ambassador further warned the U.S. would consider extending these sanctions to more officials who violate the rights of their fellow citizens. End Summary.

12. (C) On June 23, Sergey Sergeyev, Head of the U.S. and Canada Desk at the MFA, called in Ambassador to discuss the USG's implementation of visa bans and financial sanctions against GOB officials. Counselor of the U.S. and Canada Desk Andrei Rzhessky and Poloff attended as note takers. Before conveying the GOB talking points, Sergeyev complimented Ambassador for his warm speech he gave during the April 27 CitiHope humanitarian assistance event.

MFA: U.S. Violating GOB Officials' Civil Rights

13. (C) Sergeyev relayed the GOB's negative reaction to U.S. pressure on Belarus, particularly the imposition of visa bans and financial sanctions on Belarusian officials and the references to Belarus in the recent June 21 U.S.-EU Vienna summit statement. The GOB views these measures as ineffective, politically-motivated acts that violate the civil rights of those on the visa-ban and asset freeze list. Sergeyev continued that the U.S. actions were counterproductive to promoting Belarus' democratic development and only worsened the U.S.-Belarus relationship. He asserted Belarus was ready for a constructive dialogue with the U.S., but on equal terms without pressure. Paraphrasing a recent Lukashenko statement, Sergeyev claimed that for every step the U.S. makes toward improving the relationship with Belarus, the GOB would make two or three steps. Sergeyev concluded by asking Ambassador to explain why the U.S. considers the 10 persons on the asset freeze list "threats" to U.S. national security, requiring the announcement of a state of national emergency.

14. (C) Ambassador noted the USG does not take joy in imposing financial sanctions and visa bans against Belarusian officials, but the U.S. had long warned the GOB such measures would be taken against those most responsible and involved in

repression against Belarusian citizens. EUR DAS Kramer had made this quite clear during his last visit to Minsk and the Ambassador himself had stated the same in all his meetings with Belarusian officials. These measures did not materialize out of thin air or out of a desire to worsen relations with Belarus. They are responses to concrete actions taken by the Belarusian leadership against Belarusian citizens in violation of the Belarusian constitution and Belarus' obligations as a member of the OSCE and a signatory of the UN Charter on Human Rights. The U.S. and the EU view the falsified elections, the unwarranted detentions of citizens, the unfair justice system and repeated violations of the constitutional rights of Belarusians as steps the Belarusian leadership has consciously undertaken to repress its citizens. These actions have led to Belarus' worsened relations with the U.S. and EU. Ambassador warned that if the GOB continues its repressive actions, more unpleasant responses would follow. If Belarus really wants better relations with the U.S. and EU, the repression needed to stop.

MFA: U.S. A Threat To World Stability?

15. (C) Sergeyev asked Ambassador to comment on press reports that a journalist told President Bush during the June 21 U.S.-EU Summit in Vienna that the U.S. is the greatest threat to world stability. Ambassador replied as President Bush had done, calling the statement "absurd." The U.S. supports stability based on democracy and respect for citizens' rights. Repression and inequality creates instability. The U.S. sees no difference among countries and cultures in this regard.

MFA: Economic Stability A Human Right

16. (C) Responding to Ambassador's comment on stability, Sergeyev noted Belarusians enjoy a comfortable life with adequate social welfare and economic stability. When the U.S. speaks of human rights, it needs to keep in mind that maintaining a stable, comfortable lifestyle is an important human right. Ambassador agreed that economic stability was important, but noted that it was inexcusable that Belarusian citizens, even if living in conditions of economic stability, should be frightened or intimidated to express their opinions freely. Ambassador noted opposition leaders are just as much Belarusian patriots as Lukashenko, yet are portrayed as terrorists and/or American pawns and prevented from meeting with constituents or carrying out normal political activities. Ambassador maintained that Belarusians are a talented, industrious and tolerant people who would know how to run their country well without repression or a strong-hand to keep them in line.

The Future Of Student Exchanges

17. (C) Sergeyev mentioned a recent visit of students from Illinois to Belarus and hoped such visits could continue. Ambassador used this opening to note the curt response he received from the Ministry of Education curtailing the long-standing FLEX high-school exchange program, claiming the program does not comply with Belarusian law.

18. (C) Ambassador questioned the sincerity of the GOB claim that it is interested in continuing exchanges and noted that the letter from the Ministry of Education did not outline steps the U.S. could take to meet GOB requirements. Ambassador explained the U.S. was open to serious discussions with the GOB over exchanges but it would be up to the Belarusian side to want exchanges.

GOB Pleased With TIP Report, Seeks Questions to FinCin Guidelines

¶9. (C) Sergeyev handed over answers to questions submitted by the Embassy, via dipnote, in early April for the Religious Freedom Report and expressed the GOB's positive reaction to the U.S.'s 2005 TIP report. He hoped the U.S. and Belarus would continue the mutual cooperation to battle TIP. He also gave Ambassador a list of questions the MFA had on the implementation of U.S. Treasury FinCin guidelines on banking. The MFA wanted the Embassy to answer these questions because Belarus had encountered problems on money transactions involving U.S. banks processing EBRD funding for Chernobyl-related programs.

¶10. (C) Sergeyev thanked Ambassador for his position and for the Embassy's professional relationship with the MFA, but commented there was much room for improvement in U.S.-Belarusian relations. Perhaps hoping to end on a more positive note, Sergeyev presented Ambassador with invitations to a basketball match to be held in Minsk on June 24 between former NBA "stars" and the Belarusian national basketball team, organized under the aegis of Lukashenko's American friend and purported religious advisor Michael Margulies. Krol